DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 169 FL 021 823

AUTHOR Brown, Ronald L.
TITLE Developing Reading Competence in University ESL Classes.
PUB DATE Dec 92
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Conference of the Institute of Language in Education (8th, Hong Kong, December 15-17, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Educational Strategies; *English (Second Language); *English for Academic Purposes; Higher Education; Metacognition; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Strategies; Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

A discussion of reading instruction in college English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes presents an overview of reading instruction theory, looks at the role of reading strategies and metacognitive awareness in reading, describes the SQ3R study skills method of instruction, and examines how the method can be used for developing independent reading strategies. The theory underlying reading comprehension used here is the interactive model, which asserts that reading comprehension results from active attempts to construct meaning from text. It is argued that while proficiency in vocabulary and language structure are essential for successful reading, comprehension also depends on use of strategies for sorting out, evaluating, and organizing information in a text. Independent ability to use reading strategies is also important. Strategic reading relies on metacognition for reflecting on the purposes and objectives of reading, conscious selection and use of strategies while reading, and monitoring performance. It is suggested that little attention is given to reading strategies in ESL instruction. The SQ3R method is described as a study skills system with five steps: (1) surveying the reading material and establishing a purpose for reading; (2) forming questions; (3) reading in depth; (4) reciting a summary of content; and (5) reviewing to confirm understanding. (Contains 30 references.) (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 368 169

Developing Reading Competence in University ESL Classes

Ronald L. Brown

University of Guam

A Presentation to the Eighth ILE International Conference

Sponsored by the Institute of Language in Education, Hong Kong

December 15 - 17, 1992

Send correspondence to:

Dr. Ronald L. Brown
University of Guam
Division of English and Applied Linguistics
University Station
Mangilao, GU 96923 USA

Tel: (671) 734-9433
FAX: (671) 734-0012

FL021823

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ronald L. Brown

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DEVELOPING READING COMPETENCE IN UNIVERSITY ESL CLASSES

Ronald L. Brown
University of Guam, USA

Introduction

For the past decade the role of strategy use in reading has gained increased importance as a requirement for effective comprehension. While the number of strategy training experiments with second language students is limited, the results have suggested that instructing second language students in the use of reading strategies leads to improved comprehension (see Grabe, 1991 for review). Since the objective of a University ESL reading program is to develop students' competence in reading English texts to a level that they comprehend academic material, instruction of the use of reading strategies is essential.

This paper will first present a theoretical basis of reading instruction, then discuss the role of reading strategies and metacognitive awareness in reading, describe the SQ3R study skills method, and finally describe how SQ3R method can be used as a vehicle for developing independent reading strategies.

The theoretical position underlying reading comprehension under which this paper operates is the interactive model, which asserts that reading comprehension results from a reader's active attempt to construct meaning from text (Garner, 1988; Pearson, Dole, Duffy, & Roehler, 1992). In this model, reading is not solely a precise application of decoding skills centered on a sequence of words, spelling patterns, or sentence structure. Instead, the reader processes information through frames of knowledge, commonly called schemata, organizes the information in relation to schemata, predicts outcomes, and then either confirms information, adds information to the schemata, or rejects the

information. Indeed, the reader does not merely discover meaning in text: meaning is constructed by the reader (Armbruster, Echols, & Brown, 1982; Pearson, Dole, Duffy, & Roehler, 1992; Smith, 1988).

Strategic Reading and Metacognitive Awareness

While proficiency in vocabulary and language structure are essential for successful reading, comprehension depends also on the knowledge and appropriate use of strategies that permit the reader effectively to sort out, evaluate, and organize information in a text. When comprehension falters, competent readers attempt to resolve the problem by applying reading strategies. For this paper, strategy refers to a specific activity that can be used to resolve a problem in reading; for example, looking back to discover missed information. Strategic reading refers to the process of using strategies while reading.

Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson (1991) have described strategic reading as the flexible, adaptable, and conscious use of knowledge about reading to remove blockages to meaning. Strategy use is a conscious activity which involves overt actions on the part of the reader. As a prerequisite, the reader must be aware both of a problem and of strategies that can be used to resolve the problem. Spontaneous or unconscious actions while reading are not strategies.

Independent ability to use reading strategies is important since, as Stanovich (1980) has noted, good readers focus attention toward strategies to compensate for weaknesses when experiencing difficulty with comprehension. For example, a reader having difficulty with a chapter in biological science may realize that the problem is with scientific terminology and shift attention to understanding biological terms as a

means of achieving comprehension. For this to work, the student must recognize the importance of specialized vocabulary in science textbooks. Yet, students frequently lack independent reading strategies because they have not been taught these strategies or how to apply them. Palincsar and Brown (1989) have identified six essential strategies for effective reading comprehension:

1. clarifying purpose of reading to determine the appropriate approach to the task;
2. activating background knowledge;
3. focusing attention on major content;
4. evaluating content critically for internal consistency and compatibility with prior knowledge;
5. using monitoring activities such as self-questioning and paraphrasing; and
6. drawing inferences, such as predictions and interpretations, and testing them.

Strategic reading operates within the realm of metacognitive awareness, which is defined as the knowledge and active monitoring of one's own cognitive processes (Wade & Reynolds, 1989). Baker and Brown (1984) have suggested that metacognition consists of two components: knowledge, the awareness of the strategies needed for successful performance, and self-regulation, the effective use of these strategies. In this context, strategic reading is a metacognitive activity characterized by (1) a recognition of a problem while reading, (2) selection of a strategy to resolve the problem, (3) application of the strategy to the problem, and (4) assessment of the success of the strategy Research has shown that good readers have a different

metacognitive awareness of the purpose of reading and the types of strategies used during reading than poor readers do (Brown, Palincsar, & Ambruster, 1984), and that poor readers' metacognitive awareness and reading comprehension can be improved by explicit instruction of reading strategies (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, Vavrus, et al. 1986).

Readers use metacognitive awareness to reflect on their purposes and objectives of reading, consciously select and use strategies while reading, and monitor their performance. The essential element is that this activity is self-activated and self-regulated. Thus, transition from conscious "other- regulated" activities, those controlled by teachers, to self- regulation is an important factor in developing effective readers.

Strategy Instruction in University ESL Reading Classes

Despite the extensive research supporting the necessity of conscious use of reading strategies for comprehension, observational studies of ESL classrooms at the university level suggest that teachers seldom teach strategic reading but focus their instruction on working through exercises, evaluate students on their ability to replicate the content of these exercises, and provide few opportunities for students to engage in active, self-directed reading. In short, instruction in the use of reading strategies seldom occurs either explicitly or indirectly in ESL classrooms (Brown, 1992; Brock, 1986; Dinsmore, 1985; Long & Sato, 1983).

Given the evidence that strategy instruction is an essential component for reading competence, the question arises as to why so little instruction is devoted to this area. One possibility is that ESL

teachers, while aware of the importance of strategic reading, are unfamiliar with a methodology for strategy instruction. As a starting point, guidelines offered by Pearson, Dole, Duffy, & Roehler (1992) are useful as the basis for incorporating the teaching of strategy use in a university ESL reading curriculum:

1. Students need a few well-taught, well-learned strategies. There are too many strategies that could be taught and the time provided for ESL classes is limited. Students benefit more if a sample of key strategies are taught well and applied to authentic texts.
2. Reading is an integrated process. Therefore, reading is not effectively learned as sets of isolated skills. Reading strategies, in addition to vocabulary and grammar, should be incorporated into continuous learning activities.
3. Students need both demonstrations of how comprehension works and opportunities to practice strategy use. Good teaching requires explicit modeling of how to strategic as well as guided practice in developing reading proficiency.
4. Strategic reading is adaptable. Reading strategies are conscious and intentional actions and the competent reader changes strategies depending on the purpose and consequences of reading.
5. Reading instruction is adaptable. Effective instruction begins with relevant objectives, but instructors change their goals and teaching activities based upon continuous evaluation of student performance.

Ultimately, the purpose and goal of reading instruction must be

clear to both students and instructors. Reading instruction that revolves around completion of exercises is flawed in that students may assume that generating correct responses is comprehension. The effective use of decoding skills is lost when students, and perhaps teachers, interpret the course goal to be passing grammar and vocabulary based tests so students can move out of ESL. All who are involved in the reading class, therefore, must clearly understand that the goal is to produce active, independent, self-regulated readers who can monitor their reading and devise strategies to resolve problems as they arise.

A Description of the SQ3R Method

For ESL reading teachers who wish to incorporate strategy instruction into their classes, the SQ3R method provides a convenient study skills system that can be used as a basis for introducing reading strategies and developing metacognitive awareness. SQ3R was developed by Francis P. Robinson (1970) for the U.S. military and has been useful in enhancing reading comprehension in U.S. public schools and universities. The SQ3R method encourages students to become actively involved in establishing a purpose for reading, focusing their attention to comprehension while reading, and developing a habit of monitoring comprehension after reading.

The SQ3R method consists of five steps:

1. Survey: Examine headings, charts, graphs, pictures, etc., note items in boldface or italics, read the summary, and establish purpose for reading;
2. Question: form questions to be answered when reading;
3. Read: Read the material in depth and actively seek answers

to questions;

4. Recite: Produce a verbal or written summary of what has been read; and,

5. Review: Reread to confirm understanding.

Although critics have claimed that the empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of SQ3R is meager (Johns & McNamara, 1980; Gustafson & Pederson, 1984), recent research has supported the effectiveness of the method (Brown, 1992; Call, 1991; Chastain & Thurber, 1989; Reed, 1987; Simpson, 1986; Tomlinson, 1987). Kopfstein (1982) concluded that while SQ3R was a sound procedure, it was poorly taught so students failed to use it independently.

Using SQ3R as a Multicomponent System of Reading Strategies

SQ3R lends itself to being used as a multicomponent system of strategies if supplementary instruction and practice are provided that guide the student toward monitoring and evaluating reading performance. For example, Tomlinson (1987) observed that SQ3R provides readers with the opportunity to enhance their metacognitive awareness of the organization and demands of a text. However, the method is typically introduced in developmental reading textbooks as a self-contained unit and taught as a series of skill activities without reference how the steps could be used independently or together as reading strategies.

Therefore, the ESL reading instructor's task is to restructure the SQ3R steps into a coherent system of reading strategies. As mentioned above, given the large number of available strategies and the limited instructional time allocated for ESL, students are better served if provided with a few well-taught, well-learned strategies that are

practiced with authentic academic tasks. The emphasis should, therefore, be toweard integrating SQ3R with a set of strategies that students can use to enhance comprehension while simultaneously developing metacognitive awareness.

For example, Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson (1991) have identified five strategies that can be integrated with the SQ3R method:

1. Determine importance: Find the author-based important information of text, and differentiate between important and unimportant information;
2. Summarize information: Synthesize important information into a coherent text;
3. Draw inferences: Focus on implied information as well as explicitly stated information;
4. Generate questions: Interact actively with text by activating prior knowledge, settiing a purpose for reading, and directing attention to the important information.
5. Monitor comprehension: Assess comprehension during and after reading, and devise strategies to resolve problems.

All of these strategies can be taught through by SQ3R when the method is restructured as method of teaching strategic reading and metacognitive awareness. Moreover, the teacher does not have to be constrained with a one-to-one relationship as each strategy can be incorporated in multiple steps:

1. Determining importance: survey, question, read, recite, and review;
2. Summarizing: recite and review
3. Drawing inferences: read, recite, and review

4. Generating questions: question and review

5. Monitoring comprehension: read, recite, and review

The following is an example of how this restructuring appear appear; what must be stressed, however, is that ESL reading teachers must assess the needs and capabilities of their students and design a model that best suits their situation.

When introducing the SURVEY step, students are informed that the purpose of a survey is to anticipate the important information before reading. Thus, while doing the survey, the reader looks for signals that point to information the author considers important. For example:

1. Headings, subheadings, and margin notes signal important topics;
2. Boldface and Italicized words signal important vocabulary;
3. Enumerations signal a sequence or a composite set of important information; and
4. Questions at the end of a chapter signal information the author believes the reader should know.

At the conclusion of this step, the student should have a sense of the amount of information that must be learned, the level of reading difficulty, and potential reading problems that will be encountered, such as specialized vocabulary.

The QUESTION step provides the opportunity for the instructor to teach students to engage in self-questioning activities, which have been shown to be effective for comprehension enhancement (Brown, Palincsar, & Armbruster, 1984; Chan, 1988). The key to effective self-questioning is the quality of instruction in which students are explicitly informed of the purpose and benefits of self-questioning, carefully trained, and

given a meaningful structure in which to practice. Although SQ3R presents questioning solely as a before reading activity, metacognitive awareness is enhanced when students continue the process during reading.

A major weakness of the SQ3R method has been the little guidance presented on how to proceed with the third step, READ. For example, as introduced in a study skills textbook, this step is usually glossed over with generalities such as:

> Read the material section by section. As you read, look for the answer to the question you formed from the heading of that section. (McWhorter, 1989)
>
> To read means to read the chapter, keeping in mind the questions you formulated in step 2. (Rosenthal & Rowland, 1986)

Nevertheless, this step provides the instructor with the opportunity to be creative and to teach students several useful strategies, such as how to draw inferences and monitor comprehension. Drawing inferences is essential for comprehension, but is frequently neglected in ESL reading instruction where the emphasis is primarily on literal comprehension. Similarly, effective reading depends on comprehension monitoring wherein the reader recognizes when comprehension fails and devises strategies to resolve the problem. Teaching ESL students to anticipate and recognize reading problems and to take action to resolve them is critical to enchance their reading comprehension.

The RECITE step furnishes the opportunity to teach students to summarize information. Besides allowing the student to practice discrimination between important information and supporting details, writing a summary after reading is a method of self-testing. The student gains experience in self-regulated reading by assessing how much

information was recalled and understood, and by locating gaps in memory and comprehension.

Finally, the REVIEW step presents an opportunity to practice each of the strategies while rereading to identify unresolved problems, correct misunderstandings, and to reinforce learning.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to discuss the development of reading competence of students in university ESL classes by using the SQ3R method as a model for teaching reading strategies and metacognitive awareness. Reading comprehension results from an attempt to construct meaning from text. Good readers are strategic while reading, using their knowledge about reading to remove blockages to meaning. Strategic reading depends on metacognitive awareness, the knowledge and active monitoring of one's own cognitive processes. By incorporating explicit instruction of reading strategies and metacognitive awareness with the SQ3R study skills method, ESL teachers have the opportunity to enhance their students ability to comprehend academic materials.

University level ESL programs can successfully provide students with instruction and practice in dealing with lengthy and complex academic texts while encouraging them to be reflective and active in their approach to reading tasks, exactly the behaviors they need when they are dealing with academic materials. As a teaching field, ESL needs not only to address the content of the reading curriculum but also the training of ESL teachers to implement the curriculum. For a strategy based curriculum to work, the instructors must themselves be knowledgeable of the nature and use of the metacognitive processes in

reading, and be capable of competently teaching these processes. This means educating ESL instructors to be actively engaged in a mediational role rather than merely monitoring student responses to textbook exercises. In an ESL reading curriculum that incorporates instruction in strategy use and metacognitive awareness, the role of the ESL teacher is to provide the learner with means of becoming an independent, self-regulating reader.

This suggests another implication: a university level ESL student can be given responsibility for learning. In ESL reading instruction, classroom activity is frequently centered on the teacher with the students as passive respondents. While this may logical in an approach that assumes the teacher has the essential information need for success, in practice it provides a false sense of the nature of academic reading. If class activity is focused on responding to exercises, the ESL student may assume that successful reading means concentrating on discrete points of information.

When students are given the responsibility and opportunity to engage actively in strategic reading, their perception of reading changes. However, this perceptual change requires time and practice before the student becomes an independent, self-regulating reader. Yet, ESL programs have a limited amount of time to devote to their students before they transfer to their academic programs, after which student access to ESL is curtailed. Recognizing this limitation, the design and implementing of the ESL reading curriculum should be directed to providing international students with worthwhile and relevant instruction that fosters their development as capable and independent readers of English.

REFERENCES

Armbruster, B. B., Echols, C. H., & Brown, A.L. (1982). The role of metacognition in reading to learn: A developmental perspective. Volta Review 84, 5:45-56.

Baker, L. & Brown, A. L. (1984). Metacognitive skills and reading. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), Handbook of reading research. New York: Longman.

Brock, C. A. (1986). The effects of referential questions on ESL classroom discourse. TESOL Quarterly 20, 1:47- 60.

Brown, A. L., Palincsar, M. S., & Armbruster, B. B. (1984). Inducing comprehension-fostering activities in interactive learning situations. In H. Mandl, N. Stein, & T. Trabasso (Eds.), Learning and comprehension of texts. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Brown, R. L. (1992). Strangers in a Strange Land: An Field Study of a University English as a Second Language Reading Class. Paper submitted for possible publication in the TESOL Quarterly.

Call, P. E. (1991). SQ3R + What I know sheet = one strong strategy. Journal of Reading 35, 1:50-52.

Chan, L. (1988). The role of language in metacognitive instruction. In V. Bickley (Ed.), Language in Education in a Bi-Lingual or Multi-Lingual Setting. Hong Kong: Institute of Language in Education.

Chastain, G. & Thurber, S. (1989). The SQ3R study technique enhances comprehension of an introductory psychology textbook. Reading Improvement 26, 1:94-96.

Dinsmore, D. (1985). Waiting for Godot in the EFL classroom. ELT Journal 39, 4:225-234.

Dole, J. A., Duffy, G. G., Roehler, L. R., & Pearson, D. P. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. Review of Educational Research 61, 2:239-264.

Duffy, G. G., Roehler, L. R., Meloth, M. S., Vavrus, L., Book, C., Putnam, J., & Wesselman, R. (1986). The relationship between explicit verbal explanations during reading skill instruction and student awareness and achievement: A study of reading teacher effects. Reading Research Quarterly 21, 3:237-252.

Garner, R. (1988). Reading comprehension. In Metacognition and Reading Comprehension. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Grabe, W. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. TESOL Quarterly 25, 3:375-406.

Gustafson, D. J. and Pederson, J. E. (1984). SQ3R -- Myth or sound procedure? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Wisconsin State Reading Association, Oconomowoc, WI.

Jacobowitz, T. (1988). Using theory to modify practice: An illustration with SQ3R. Journal of Reading 32, 2:126- 131.

Johns, J. L. and McNamara, L. P. (1980). The SQ3R study technique: A forgotten research target. Journal of Reading 22, 8:705-708.

Kopfstein, R. W. (1982). SQ3R doesn't work -- or does it? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western College Reading Association, San Diego, 1982.

Long, M. H. & Sato, C. J. (1983). Classroom Foreigner Talk Discourse: Forms and Functions of Teachers' Questions. In Herbert W. Seliger & Michael H. Long (Eds.), Classroom Oriented Research in Second Language Acquisition. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

McWhorter, K. T. (1989). College Reading and Study Skills, Fourth Edition. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company.

Palincsar, A. S. & Brown, A. L. (1989). Instruction for self-regulated reading. In L. B. Resnick & L. E. Klopfer (Eds.), Toward the thinking curriculum: Current cognitive research. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Pearson, P. D., Dole, J., Duffy, G. G., & Roehler, L. R. (1992). Developing Expertise in Reading Comprehension: What Should Be Taught? How Should It Be Taught? In A. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.) What Research Has To Say About Reading Instruction, 2nd Edition. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Reed, K. X. (1987). An analytical comparison of reading levels of junior college students with the readability levels of textbooks used in content area courses. Paper presented at the annual conference of the post-secondary reading council of Alabama, Montgomery, 1987.

Robinson, F. P. (1970). Effective Study, 4th Edition. New York: Harper and Row.

Rosenthal, L. and Rowland, S. B. (1986). Academic Reading and Study Skills for International Students, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Simpson, M. L. (1986). Teaching university freshman to employ, regulate, and transfer study strategies to the content areas. Forum for Reading 17, 2:61-71.

Smith, F. (1988). Understanding Reading, Fourth Edition. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Snyder, V. (1984). Effects of study techniques on developmental college students' retention of textbook chapters. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1984.

Stanovich, K. E. (1980). Toward an interactive-compensatory model of individual differences in the development of reading fluency. Reading Research Quarterly 16: 1:32- 71.

Tomlinson, L. M. (1987). Recognition to recall: Self- questioning to enhance students' metacognition of organization and demands of text. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (32nd, Anaheim, CA, May 3-7, 1987)

Wade, S. E. and Reynolds, R. E. (1989). Developing metacognitive awareness. Journal of Reading 33, 1:6-14.